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ANTELOPE VALLEY CONTINUES CLEAN AIR TREND IN '01 Local Air Quality Flourishes While Nearby Communities Brace for Tighter Regs

Lancaster -- As some nearby communities struggled to hold on to air quality gains achieved over the last decade, the Antelope Valley continued to bolster its reputation as a clean air mecca in 2001, chalking up its 12th consecutive summer free of Stage 1 smog episodes.

A Stage 1 episode is declared by the Antelope Valley Air Pollution Control District (AVAPCD) when ozone levels average .20 parts per million (ppm) for an hour, thus rendering air quality unhealthful. The highest ozone level recorded locally during the 2001 smog season - which spanned from May to October - was a .15 ppm measured at the AVAPCD's Lancaster air monitoring station on July 2.

Exceedances of the federal ozone standard recorded to date also attest to the continuation of a long-term trend of air quality improvements Valley-wide: this summer, only three exceedances of the federal .12 ppm 1-hour standard were recorded within the AVAPCD's boundaries. Although that number represents a slight increase from the summer of 2000 - when only two exceedances were recorded - this year's end-of-smog-season total represents a 63% decline from 1991, when eight days surpassed the federal ozone standard within the Antelope Valley.

The Antelope Valley's 2001 ozone readings also compared favorably with those measured in the nearby South Coast Air Basin (SoCAB), which has also made remarkable strides toward reducing smog over the past decade: in 1991, 130 federal ozone exceedances were recorded within the SoCAB, which includes the metropolitan Los Angeles area; by October of 2001, that number of exceedances had fallen to just 36.

Air quality improvements in the L.A. basin translate into cleaner air for the Antelope Valley, based on the two regions' proximity to one another. Along with less air pollution wafting into the Valley from Los Angeles, control measures implemented by local businesses and lower emitting new vehicles are also credited with helping to make the Valley's air quality among the cleanest in Southern California.

In contrast, recent media stories have reported that other California cities - such as Bakersfield and Fresno - are beginning to rival the metropolitan Los Angeles region's former claim to the

nation's most polluted air. While control measures designed to bring the San Joaquin Valley into compliance with the federal health-based standard for ozone has reduced the incidence of unhealthful air in the region - from 51 federal exceedances in 1991, to 28 as of October 2001 - progress toward this goal was not sufficient to preclude the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) from reclassifying the area from a Serious to a Severe Ozone Nonattainment Area last October 23.

While neighboring areas brace themselves for the possibility of tougher air regulations, the AVAPCD continues to offer its regulated industry lower compliance costs than several nearby air districts, as well as good air quality. "Based on our exceptional clean air record, the AVAPCD is able to extend reasonable permitting costs and quick permit turnaround with a minimum of red tape to Antelope Valley businesses," commented Frank Roberts, Chairman of the AVAPCD's Governing Board, adding "We're proud of our common sense approach to air quality regulation, which not only fosters economic development in the Valley, but also protects our legendary clean air."